

Maundy Thursday, Gospel Year A

Let Me Drink That for You

Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19

Maundy Thursday

Analysis by Cathy Lessmann

116:1 I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my supplications. 2 Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live. 12 What shall I return to the LORD for all his bounty to me? 13 I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD, 14 I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people. 15 Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful ones. 16 O LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your serving girl. You have loosed my bonds. 17 I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the LORD. 18 I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people, 19 in the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!

Author's Note: This is a psalm of thanksgiving for healing and expresses tremendous faith and gratitude to Yahweh. Since this is Maundy Thursday, why not also read into it that Jesus ultimately becomes the speaker/psalmist whose absolute trust in Yahweh's mercy transforms "the cup of wrath" into the "cup of salvation"—via his body and blood?



DIAGNOSIS: The Cup of Wrath

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Life Is Tough

No matter how much we try to avoid it, no matter how much we deny it, we all end up suffering pain and misery. Worse, we know that our pain and misery is caused not only by disease, circumstances, nature, and entropy—over which we have little to no control, but (dang) also from the way we treat each other—over which we do have control. It's hard to admit that we are often the “bad guys” in the drama of life.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Denial

But of course, we'd rather not be honest, instead whine, “this isn't my fault!” We assume there's something about us that sets us apart and exempts us. Or, we look around and find some sort of alternative “gods” who can rescue us from our misery – gods like our portfolios, or our medical systems, or our military, and so on.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Bitter Death

Yet somehow, subconsciously, deep down, we sense that God is involved in everything that happens to us—not just the good, but also the bad. Our gut instinct is to revert back to Step 2 above: denial and other-god-chasing. Yet those “other gods” have turned silent on us and cannot rescue us. We blather, “God can’t be that mean—at least, not to me!” And yet ...we still experience God’s absence and God’s judgment, and deep down, we understand that we deserve it! Isaiah called that Yahweh’s “cup of wrath” (Isa. 51:17). It’s bitter and tastes like death.

PROGNOSIS: The Cup of Salvation

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): The “Faithful One” Drinks for Us

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ur psalmist sings, “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful ones (v. 15).” My commentary says that the word “precious” can be also be translated as “grievous.” Hence that would read: “Grievous in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones.” Really? That radiates mercy! It suggests

that Yahweh does not relish retribution, but actually prefers mercy—even for people who don't deserve it! We know now that Yahweh's mercy became real when Jesus held his hand out to the suffering and dying, inviting, "Hand it over. Give it to me. Let me drink that cup for you." Recall, it was on that first Maundy Thursday that Jesus went to Gethsemane and pleaded with Almighty God to "let this cup (the "cup of wrath") pass from me." Crucially, he went on: "Yet not what I want but what you want; your will be done" (Matt. 26:36-46). It is here that I would switch the Psalmist's translation back to "precious." "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful ONE [Jesus]." By faithfully going to the cross and drinking our "cup of wrath"—and then surviving it—Jesus becomes the "faithful ONE" of whom our psalmist sings.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): The New Drink

Today's epistle lesson recalls that "in the night in which he was betrayed," Jesus offers a new cup, a life-giving drink—His own flesh and blood: the "cup of salvation." Call that mercy; call that forgiveness; call that eternal life. Tasting mercy, we trust the Mercy-Giver, just as the psalmist had. Just as Jesus had. With confidence, we repeat the psalmist's words of trust—that forever after, we "will call on [Yahweh] as long as [we] live" (v. 2).

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Faithful Ones" Give Thanks and Follow Their Leader

Guess what? The "cup of salvation" makes us drunk with joy. We join the psalmist and praise the Drink-Giver at the top of our lungs. Or (to put it another way), with our whole lives. We join the psalmist in offering our selves up as "thanksgiving sacrifices"—meaning, we "give our lives away" to the people around us. No matter what happens—pain, misery, death. We can

sing through our tears: "I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord (v. 13)."